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Rupert Brooke
and the
Intellectual
Imagination

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Walter de la Mare

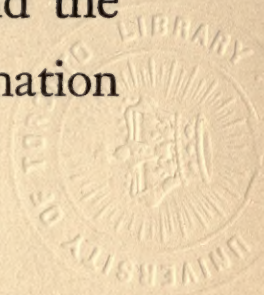




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Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination

A Lecture
by
Walter de la Mare



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Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination

ONE evening in 1766, Dr Johnson being then in the fifty-seventh year of his age, his friends, Boswell and Goldsmith, called on him at his lodgings in Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, with the intention of persuading him to sup with them at the Mitre. But though he was proof against their cajoleries, he was by no means averse from a talk. With true hospitality, since he had himself, we are told, become a water-drinker, he called for a bottle of port. This his guests proceeded to discuss. While they sipped, the three of them conversed on subjects no less beguiling than play-going and poetry.

Goldsmith ventured to refer to the deplorable fact that his old friend and former schoolfellow had given up the writing of verses. "Why, sir," replied Johnson, "our tastes greatly alter. The lad does not care for the child's rattle. . . . As we advance in the journey of life, we drop some of the things which have pleased us; whether it be that we are fatigued and don't

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choose to carry so many things any farther, or that we find other things which we like better."

Boswell persisted. "But, sir," said he, "why don't you give us something in some other way." "No, sir," Johnson replied, "I am not obliged to do any more. No man is obliged to do as much as he can do. A man is to have part of his life to himself." "But I wonder, sir," Boswell continued, "you have not more pleasure in writing than in not writing." Whereupon descended the crushing retort, "Sir, you *may* wonder."

Johnson then proceeded to discuss the actual making of verses. "The great difficulty," he observed—alas, how truly, "is to know when you have made good ones." Once, he boasted, he had written as many as a full hundred lines a day; but he was then under forty, and had been inspired by no less fertile a theme than "The Vanity of Human Wishes," a poem that, with other prudent counsel, bids the "young enthusiast" pause ere he choose literature and learning as a spiral staircase to fame:—

Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes
And pause awhile from Letters, to be wise . . .

None the less, Johnson made haste to assure Goldsmith that his Muse even at this late day was not wholly mum:—"I am not quite idle; I made one line t'other day; but I made no more."

“Let us hear it,” cried Goldsmith, “we’ll put a bad one to it!” “No, sir, I have forgot it.” And so sally succeeded sally.

How much of the virtue of Johnson’s talk we are to attribute to Boswell’s genius for selection and condensation, and how much to the habituality of his idol’s supreme judgment, penetration, humanity and good sense, is one of the delectable problems of literature. This fact, at any rate, is unquestionable; namely, that Johnson seldom indeed let fall a remark, even though merely in passing, which is not worth a sensible man’s consideration. He knew—rare felicity—what he was talking about. He spoke—rare presence of mind—not without, but after, aforethought. However dogmatic, overbearing and partisan he might be, not only in what he is recorded to have said is there always something substantive and four-square, but frequently even a light and occasional utterance of his will stand like a signpost at the cross-roads positively imploring the traveller to make further exploration.

“The lad does not care for the child’s rattle.” Here, surely, is one of those signposts, one more enticing invitation to explore. By rattle, obviously, Johnson meant not only things childish, but things childlike. For such things the ‘lad’ does not merely cease to care. He

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substitutes for them other things which he likes better. Not that every vestige of charm and sentiment necessarily deserts the rattle, but other delights intrude; and, what is still more important, other faculties that will take pleasure in these new toys and interests come into energy and play. Does not this rightly imply that between childhood and boyhood is fixed a perceptible gulf, physical, spiritual, psychological, and that in minds in which the powers and tendencies conspicuous in boyhood, and more or less dormant or latent in earlier years, predominate, those of childhood are apt to fade and fall away?

This is true, I think, of us all, whatever our gifts and graces; but in a certain direction I believe it is true in a peculiar degree of poets—of children and lads (and possibly lasses, though they, fortunately for me, lie outside my immediate inquiry) who are destined, or doomed, to become poets. Poets, that is, may be divided, for illustration and convenience, into two distinct classes: those who in their idiosyncrasies resemble children and bring to ripeness the faculties peculiar to childhood; and those who resemble lads. On the one hand is the poet who carries with him through life, in varying vigour and variety, the salient characteristics of childhood (though modified, of course, by subsequent

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activities and experience). On the other is the poet who carries with him the salient characteristics of boyhood (though modified by the experiences and activities of his childhood). This is little more than a theory, but it may be worth a passing scrutiny.

What are the salient characteristics of childhood? Children, it will be agreed, live in a world peculiarly their own, so much so that it is doubtful if the adult can do more than very fleetingly reoccupy that far-away consciousness. There is, however, no doubt that the world of the grown-up is to children an inexhaustible astonishment and despair. They brood on us. And perhaps it is well that we are not invited to their pow-wows, until, at any rate, the hatchet for the hundredth time is re-buried. Children are in a sense butterflies, though they toil with an almost inconceivable assiduity after life's scanty pollen and nectar, and though, by a curious inversion of the processes of nature, they may become the half-comatose and purblind chrysalides which too many of us poor mature creatures so ruefully resemble. They are not bound in by their groping senses. Facts to them are the liveliest of chameleons. Between their dream and their reality looms no impassable abyss. There is no solitude more secluded than a child's, no

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absorption more complete, no insight more exquisite and, one might even add, more comprehensive. As we strive to look back and to live our past again, can we recall any joy, fear, hope or disappointment more extreme than those of our childhood, any love more impulsive and unquestioning, and, alas, any boredom so unmitigated and unutterable ?

We call their faith, even in ourselves, credulity ; and are grown perhaps so accustomed to life's mysteries that we pale at their candour. " I am afraid you cannot understand it, dear," exclaimed a long-suffering mother, at the end of her resources. " O yes, I can very well," was her little boy's reply, " if only you would not explain." " Why is there such a lot of things in the world if no one knows all these things ? " ran another small mind's inquiry. And yet another : " Perhaps the world is a fancy, mother. Shall I wake from this dream ? "

We speak indulgently of childish make-believe, childish fancy. Bret Harte was nearer the truth when he maintained that " the dominant expression of a child is gravity." The cold fact is that few of us have the energy to be serious at their pitch. There runs a jingle :

O, whither go all the nights and days ?
And where can to-morrow be ?

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Is anyone there, when *I'm* not there?

And why am I always *Me*?

With such metaphysical riddles as these—riddles which no philosopher has yet answered to anybody's but his own entire satisfaction—children entertain the waking moments of their inward reverie. They are contemplatives, solitaries, fakirs, who sink again and again out of the noise and fever of existence into a waking vision. We can approach them only by way of intuition and remembrance, only by becoming even as one of them; though there are many books—Sully's "Studies of Childhood," for instance, Mr Gosse's "Father and Son," John Ruskin's "Præterita," Serge Aksakoff's "Years of Childhood," Henry James's "A Small Boy and Others"—which will be a really vivid and quiet help in times of difficulty.

This broken dream, then, this profound self-communion, this innocent peace and wonder make up the secret existence of a really child-like child: while the intellect is only stirring.

Then, suddenly life flings open the door of the nursery. The child becomes a boy. I do not mean that the transformation is as instantaneous as that, though, if I may venture to give a personal testimony, I have seen two children plunge out into the morning for the first time to

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their first boys'-school, and return at evening transmogrified, so to speak, into that queer, wild, and (frequently) amiable animal known as a boy. Gradually the childish self retires like a shocked snail into its shell. Like a hermit crab it accumulates defensive and aggressive disguises. Consciousness from being chiefly subjective becomes largely objective. The steam-engine routs Faërie. Actuality breaks in upon dream. School rounds off the glistening angles. The individual is swamped awhile by the collective. Yet the child-mind, the child-imagination persists, and if powerful, never perishes.

But *here*, as it seems to me, is the dividing line. It is here that the boyish type of mind and imagination, the intellectual analytical type begins to show itself, and to flourish. The boy—I merely refer, if I may be forgiven, to Boy, and far more tentatively to Girl, in the abstract, though, of course, there is no such entity—the boy is happy in company. Company sharpens his wits, awakens his rivalry, deepens his responsiveness, enlarges his responsibility, “stirs him up,” as we say. Apron-strings, however dear their contents, were always a little restrictive. He borrows a pitiless pair of scissors. He, unlike the child told of by Blake and Vaughan and Traherne, had always more or less “under-

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stood this place." He loves "a forward motion"—the faster the better. When "shades of the prison-house" begin to close about him, he immediately sets out to explore the jail. His natural impulse is to discover the thronging, complicated, busy world, to sail out into the West, rather than to dream of a remote Orient. He is a restless, curious, untiring inquirer; though preferably on his own lines rather than on those dictated to him. He wants to test, to examine, to experiment.

We must beware of theories and pigeon-holes. Theory is a bad master, and there is a secret exit to every convenient pigeon-hole. There are children desperately matter-of-fact; there are boys dreamily matter-of-fancy. But roughly, these are the two phases of man's early life. Surroundings and education may mould and modify, but the inward bent of each one of us is persistent. Can we not, indeed, divide "grown-ups" into two distinct categories; those in whom the child is most evident, and those resembling the boy? "Men are but children of a larger growth," says Dryden. And Praed makes fun of the sad fact: "Bearded men to-day appear just Eton boys grown heavy." The change is one of size rather than one of quality. Indeed, in its fight for a place, in its fair play

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and foul, in its rigid conventions, in its contest for prizes that are so oddly apt to lose their value as soon as they are won, how like the school of life is to any other school; how strangely opinions differ regarding its rules, its aims, its method, its routine and its Headmaster.

And the poets? They, too, attend both schools. But what are the faculties and qualities of mind which produce poetry, or which incline men towards it? According to Byron, there are four elements that we are justified in demanding of a poet. He found them, not without satisfaction, more conspicuous in Pope than in his contemporaries. These elements are sense, learning (in moderation), passion and invention. Perhaps because he was less rich in it, he omitted a fifth element, by no means the least essential. I mean imagination, the imagination that not merely invents, but that creates, and pierces to the inmost spirit and being of life, humanity and nature. This poetical imagination also is of two distinct kinds or types. The one divines, the other discovers. The one is intuitive, inductive; the other logical, deductive. The one visionary, the other intellectual. The one knows that beauty is truth, the other proves that truth is beauty. And the poet inherits, as it seems to me, the one kind from the child in him, the other from the boy in

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him. Not that any one poet's imagination is purely and solely of either type. The greatest poets—Shakespeare, Dante, Goëthe, for instance, are masters of both. Other poets, Wordsworth, Keats, Patmore, for instance, may manifest in varying measure the one impulse and the other. But the two streams, though their source and tributaries intermingle, are distinguishable; and such poets as Plato, the writer of the Book of Job, Vaughan, Blake, Coleridge, and Shelley, may be taken as representative of the one type; Lucretius, Donne, Dryden, Byron, Browning, Meredith, as representative of the other. Is not life both a dream and an awakening?

The visionaries, those whose eyes are fixed on the distance, on the beginning and end, rather than on the incident and excitement, of life's journey, have to learn to substantiate their imaginings, to base their fantastic palaces on *terra firma*, to weave their dreams into the fabric of actuality. But the source and origin of their poetry is in the world within. The intellectual imagination, on the other hand, flourishes on knowledge and experience. It must first explore before it can analyse, devour before it can digest, the world in which it finds itself. It feeds and feeds upon ideas, but because it is creative, it expresses them in the terms of

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humanity, of the senses and the emotions, makes life of them, that is. There is less mystery, less magic in its poetry. It does not demand of its reader so profound or so complete a surrender. But if any youthfulness is left in us, we can share its courage, enthusiasm and energy, its zest and enterprise, its penetrating thought, its wit, fervour, passion, and we should not find it impossible to sympathise with its wild revulsions of faith and feeling, its creative scepticism.

Without imagination of the one kind or the other mortal existence is indeed a dreary and prosaic business. The moment we begin to *live*—when we meet the friend of friends, or fall in love, or think of our children, or make up our minds, or set to the work we burn to do, or make something, or vow a vow, or pause suddenly face to face with beauty—at that moment the imagination in us kindles, begins to flame. Then we actually talk in rhythm. What is genius but the possession of this supreme inward energy in a rare and intense degree? Illumined by the imagination, our life—whatever its defeats and despairs—is a never-ending, unforeseen strangeness and adventure and mystery. This is the fountain of our faith and of our hope.

And so, by what I am afraid has been a tediously circuitous route, I have come at length to

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Rupert Brooke and to *his* poetry. His surely was the intellectual imagination possessed in a rare degree. Nothing in his work is more conspicuous than its preoccupation with actual experience, its adventurousness, its daring, its keen curiosity and interest in ideas, its life-giving youthfulness. Nothing in his work is more conspicuous by its absence than reverie, a deep still broodingness. The children in his poems are few. They are all seen objectively, from without; though a wistful childlike longing for peace and home and mother dwells in such a poem as "Retrospect" or "A Memory." I am not sure that the word 'dream' occurs in them at all.*

"Don't give away one of the first poets in England," he says in one of his letters, "but there is in him still a very, very small portion that's just a little childish." Surely it was the *boy* in him that boasted in that jolly, easy fashion, the boy in him that was a little shamefaced to confess to that faint vestige of childishness.

* To my shame and consternation my friend Mr Edward Marsh has pointed out to me, since this paper was read, that the word 'dream' occurs in no less than fifteen of Brooke's poems. This, I hope, will be one more salutary lesson that general impressions are none the worse for being put to a close test. Still, the fact that that peculiar, dreamlike quality and atmosphere which is so conspicuous in the poetry of the visionaries is very rarely, if ever, present in that of Brooke will not, I think, be gainsaid.

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The theme of his poetry is the life of the mind, the senses, the feelings, life here and now, however impatient he may be with life's limitations. Its longing is for a state of consciousness wherein this kind of life shall be possible without exhaustion, disillusionment, or reaction. His words, too, are not symbols; they mean precisely what they say and only what they say. Whereas the words of the mystics of the child-like imagination, Blake and Vaughan and Coleridge, seem chiefly to mean what is left hinted at, rather than expressed. His world stands out sharp and distinct, like the towers and pinnacles of a city under the light and blue of the sky. Their world, old as Eden and remote as the stars, lies like the fabric of a vision, bathed in an unearthly atmosphere. He desired, loved, and praised things in themselves for their energy, vividness and naturalness; they for some inward and spiritual significance, for the reality of which they are the painted veil. *They* live in the quietude of their imaginations, in a far-away listening, and are most happy when at peace, if not passive. He is all activity, apprehensiveness.

Nothing pleases him so much as doing things, though, fretted that body and mind so soon weary, he may pine for sleep. His writing, whether in his poems, his "Webster," or in his letters, is itself

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a kind of action ; and he delights far more than the mystics in things touched, smelt and tasted. He delights, that is, in things in themselves not merely for their beauty or for the unseen reality they represent. He is restless, enquiring, veers in the wind like a golden weathercock. He is impatient of a vague idealism, as wary as a fox of the faintest sniff of sentimentality. To avoid them (not always quite successfully,) he flies to the opposite extreme, and to escape from what he calls the rosy mists of poets' experience emphasises the unpleasant side of life. His one desire is to tell each salient moment's truth about it. Truth at all costs : let beauty take care of itself. So he came to write and to defend poems that in Mr Marsh's witty phrase one finds it disquieting to read at meals. A child, a visionary, lives in eternity ; a man in time, a boy—sheer youthfulness—in the moment. It is the moments that flower for Brooke. What is his poem " Dining-room Tea " but the lovely cage of an instant when in ecstasy time and the world stood still ?

For truth's sake he has no fear of contradictions. The mood changes, the problem, even the certainty shows itself under different aspects ; he will be faithful to each in turn. Obviously he rather enjoyed shocking the stagnant and

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satisfied, and baiting the thin-blooded philosophers, enjoyed indeed shocking and baiting himself; but he also delighted, for the pure intellectual exercise, in looking, as we say, all round a thing. If, unlike Methuselah, he did not live long enough to see life whole, he at least confronted it with a remarkably steady and disconcerting stare. If he was anywhere at ease, it was in "the little nowhere of the brain." Again and again, for instance, he speculates on the life that follows death. First (mere chronological order is not absolutely material) he imagines the Heaven of the fish:

Fat caterpillars drift around,
And Paradisal grubs are found;
Unfading moths, immortal flies,
And the worm that never dies.
And in that Heaven of all their wish,
There shall be no more land, say fish.

Next, he laments despairingly in Tahiti, with a kind of wistful mockery, at the thought of an immortality wherein all is typical and nothing real:

And you'll no longer swing and sway
Divinely down the scented shade,
Where feet to Ambulation fade,
And moons are lost in endless Day.
How shall we wind these wreaths of ours,
Where there are neither heads nor flowers? . . .

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Next, he momentarily wafts himself into the being of a Shade :

So a poor ghost, beside his misty streams,
Is haunted by strange doubts, evasive dreams,
Hints of a pre-Lethean life, of men,
Stars, rocks, and flesh, things unintelligible,
And light on waving grass, he knows not when,
And feet that ran, but where, he cannot tell.

Next, he deprecates the possibility of a future life even as tenuous and nebulous as this :

Poor straws! on the dark flood we catch awhile,
Cling, and are borne into the night apart.
The laugh dies with the lips, 'Love' with the lover.

And, again, he is lost in rapture at the possibility which he mocked at in the first poem, sighed at in the second, belittled in the third, and denied in the fourth :

Not dead, not undesirous yet,
Still sentient, still unsatisfied,
We'll ride the air, and shine, and flit,
Around the places where we died,

And dance as dust before the sun,
And light of foot, and unconfined,
Hurry from road to road, and run
About the errands of the wind.

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And every mote, on earth or air,
Will speed and gleam, down later days,
And like a secret pilgrim fare
By eager and invisible ways,

Nor ever rest, nor ever lie,
Till, beyond thinking, out of view,
One mote of all the dust that's I
Shall meet one atom that was you.

Then in some garden hushed from wind,
Warm in a sunset's afterglow,
The lovers in the flowers will find
A sweet and strange unquiet grow

Upon the peace; and, past desiring,
So high a beauty in the air,
And such a light, and such a quiring,
And such a radiant ecstasy there,

They'll know not if it's fire, or dew,
Or out of earth, or in the height,
Singing, or flame, or scent, or hue,
Or two that pass, in light, to light,

Out of the garden, higher, higher. . . .

Which of these conflicting solutions, we may inquire, to one of Life's obscurest problems are we to accept as his? Do, or do not, such seductive speculations as these confirm the view expressed by Plato in the *Republic* that the poets undermine the rational principle in the soul? It may be admitted that such poetry as this, in

the words of Bacon, "makes men witty," and is unquestionably a "criticism of life"; but can it be said to teach—as Wordsworth intended that *his* poetry should? Well, when Mrs Barbauld had the temerity to charge "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" with two grave faults; first, that it was improbable, and next, that it had no moral; Coleridge cheerfully pleaded guilty to the first charge, while, as for the other, "I told her that . . . it had too much—that is, for a work of pure imagination." Will it satisfy "serious" inquirers if it be suggested that these poems of Brooke's are manifestations of the intellectual imagination? Probably not. They demand of a poet a definite and explicit philosophy. They desire of him a confirmation, if not of their own faith, then of his. But it cannot be too clearly recognised that the faith of a poet is expressed in *all* that he writes. He cannot, either as a man or as a poet, live without faith; and never does. A few lovely words about lovely things is an expression of faith: so, too, is all love, all desire for truth, all happiness. If we have such faith ourselves, if we search close enough, we shall find a poet's faith expressed implicitly throughout his work.

We must, too, be thankful for many and various mercies, the mercy, for instance (so richly con-

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ferred in Brooke's writing) that here was a man who never spared mind and spirit in the effort to do the best work he could, who was that finest thing any man can be—a true craftsman delighting in his job. We cannot demand that a poet shall answer each of our riddles in turn; “tidy things up.” He shares our doubts and problems; exults in them, and at the same time proves that life in spite of all its duplicity and deceits and horrors, is full of strangeness, wonder, mystery, grace and power: is “good.” This, at any rate, is true of Rupert Brooke. And he knew well enough that the nearer a poet gets to preaching, the more cautious he should be respecting the pulpit and the appurtenances thereof.

As with the life hereafter, so with this life, so with love. The sentimentalist always shy of the real, the cynic always hostile to it, cling to some pleasing dream or ugly nightmare of the real, knowing them to be illusions. That is precisely what Brooke, keen, insistent, analytical, refused to do. He pours out his mind and heart for instance in the service of love. The instant that love is dead, he has, to put it crudely, very little use for its corpse. He refuses point blank to find happiness in any happy medium, to be a wanderer, as he said, in “the middle mist.” There are two sides—many more than two, as a

matter of fact—to every question. “Blue Evening” or “The Voice” prove his competence to see both. At times, indeed, with a kind of boyish waywardness and obstinacy he prefers the other side—the ugliest—of the much-flattered moon. Helen’s young face was beautiful. True. In age not only must she have lost her now immortal fairness, but possibly she became repulsive. Well, then, as a poet, hating “sugared lies,” he said so. 17

It is indeed characteristic of the intellectual imagination to insist on ‘life’s little ironies.’ It destroys in order to rebuild. Every scientist, who is not a mere accumulator of facts, possesses it. Acutely sensitive to the imperfections of the present, its hope is in the future; whereas the visionary, certainly no less conscious of flaw and evil, is happy in his faith in the past, or rather in the eternal now. The one cries “What shall I do?” the other “What must I be?” The one, as has been said, would prove that truth is beauty; the other knows that beauty is truth. After all, to gain the *whole* world is in one true sense to save the soul.

In the lugubrious and exciting moment when Brooke wrote “Kindliness” and “Menelaus and Helen,” it was not his aim or thought to see that age, no less than youth and beauty is, in his own

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phrase, 'pitiful with mortality.' He resented ugliness and decay, and associated them with death and evil. For death, whatever else it may be, brings destruction of the beauty of the body; and evil brings the destruction of the spirit which is the life and light of the body. They are the contraries of a true living energy; and because his mind seemed to be indestructible, and his body as quick with vitality as a racehorse, and love the very lantern of beauty, he not only feared the activities of death, but was intolerant of mere tranquillity, even of friendliness, and, above all, of masking make-believe.

Sometimes, indeed, in his poetry, in his letters, he is not quite just to himself in the past, or even in the present, because he seemed to detect compromise and pretence. "So the poor love of fool and blind I've proved you, For, fool or lovely, 'twas a fool that loved you." On the other hand, listen to these fragments from the letters in Mr Marsh's vivifying memoir, "I find myself smiling a dim, gentle, poetic, paternal Jehovah-like smile—over the ultimate excellence of humanity." "Dear! dear! it's very trying being so exalted one day, and ever so desperate the next—this self-knowledge! . . ." "I know what things are good: friendship and work and conversation. These I shall have. . ."

He tells how the day has brought back to him "that tearing hunger to do and do and do things. I want to walk 1000 miles, and write 1000 plays, and sing 1000 poems, and drink 1000 pots of beer, and kiss 1000 girls, and—oh, a million things! . . . The spring makes me almost ill with excitement. I go round corners on the roads shivering and nearly crying with suspense, as one did as a child, fearing some playmate in waiting to jump out and frighten one. . . ." "Henceforward," writes Mr Marsh in another passage, "the only thing he cared for—or rather he felt he ought to care for—in a man, was the possession of goodness; its absence the one thing he hated. . . . It was the spirit, the passion that counted with him."

His verse tells the same tale. Life to poetry, poetry to life—that is one of the few virtuous circles. Life and thought to him were an endless adventure. His mind, as he says, was restless as a scrap of paper in the wind. His moods ebbed and flowed, even while his heart, that busy heart, as he called it, was deeply at rest. Wit to such a mind is a kind of safety-valve, or even the little whistle which the small boy pipes up for courage' sake in the dark. Letters and poems flash and tingle with wit—and rare

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indeed are the poems in our language which, like "Tiare Tahiti," "The Funeral of Youth," and "The Old Vicarage," are witty and lovely at the same time :

And in that garden, black and white,
Creep whispers through the grass all night ;
And spectral dance, before the dawn,
A hundred Vicars down the lawn ;
Curates, long dust, will come and go
On lissom, clerical, printless toe ;
And oft between the boughs is seen
The sly shade of a Rural Dean . . .
Till, at a shiver in the skies,
Vanishing with Satanic cries,
The prim ecclesiastic rout
Leaves but a startled sleeper-out,
Grey heavens, the first bird's drowsy calls,
The falling house that never falls . . .

Few poets have mocked and made fun and made beauty like that, all in one breath, and certainly not the childlike visionaries, though one of them knew that even by mere playing the innocent may go to heaven. And beneath Brooke's wit was humour—the humour that is cousin to the imagination, smiling magnanimously at the world it loves and understands.

Byron, too, was witty, mocking, enjoyed turning things inside out and wrong side upwards, picking ideas to pieces, shocking the timid, the

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reality, that drenches a word, a phrase, with the light that was never strangely cast even on the Spice Islands or Cathay, he has that other poetic magic that can in a line or two present a portrait, a philosophy, and fill the instant with a changeless grace and truth. That magic shines out in such fragments, for instance, as :

Beauty was there,
Pale in her black ; dry-eyed ; she stood alone . . .

or

And turn, and toss your brown delightful head,
Amusedly, among the ancient Dead ;

or

And less-than-echoes of remembered tears
Hush all the loud confusion of the heart :

or

There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
And wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night.

What, again, is it but this magic which stills
the heart, gives light to the imagination, in one

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of the less well-known, but not the least quiet and tender of his poems, "Doubts" ?

When she sleeps, her soul, I know,
Goes a wanderer on the air,
Wings where I may never go,
Leaves her lying, still and fair,
Waiting, empty, laid aside,
Like a dress upon a chair . . .
This I know, and yet I know
Doubts that will not be denied.

For if the soul be not in place,
What has laid trouble in her face ?
And, sits there nothing ware and wise
Behind the curtain of her eyes,
What is it, in the self's eclipse,
Shadows, soft and passingly,
About the corners of her lips,
The smile that is essential she ?

And if the spirit be not there,
Why is fragrance in the hair ?

Above all, Brooke's poems are charged with, and surrender the magic of what we call personality. They seem, as we read them, to bring us into a happy, instant relationship with him, not only ghostly eye to eye, but mind to mind. They tell more than even friendship could discover unaided. They share his secrets with the world—as if a

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boy had turned out the contents of his astonishing pockets just before going to bed. They share them, too, in that queer paradoxical fashion which makes a volume of poems a more secure refuge even than one's lawyer, one's doctor, or a priest.

Many of our fellow-creatures—whether we like or dislike them, approve or disapprove—always remain a little mysterious and problematical. Even when they most frankly express themselves, we are conscious that there is still something in them that eludes us, a dream unshared, a reticence unbroken, a fugitive phantom. Have we, indeed, all of us, to the last dim corner and attic, cellar and corridor, explored ourselves? Because of his very candour, because, so to speak, of what he looked like, this was to some extent true of Rupert Brooke. Age, in time, scrawls our very selves upon our faces. Fast-locked the door of our souls may be, but the key hangs in the porch. But youth and delightful manners may be a mask concealing gravity and deep feeling. And what is one's remembrance of that serenely eager, questing face, stilled, as it were, with the phantom of a smile that might have lingered in the countenance of the Sphinx in her younger days, but that of the very embodiment of youth?

We don't often meet people in this world who instantly recall the Golden Age and remind us that the Greek sculptors went to Life for their models. Even Henry James, in his essay on Brooke, not less in its translucency than five fathoms deep, seems to pause Prospero-like before that Ariel whom he had suddenly encountered in the beautiful setting of the Cambridge "backs." With the lingering gusto which an epicure lavishes on a rare old vintage he tastes—tastes again, and all but hesitates for words to express his precise and ultimate reaction ; and to suggest that Henry James was ever at a loss for words is to insinuate that the Mississippi might run short of water.

One was just happy in Brooke's company. Guiltily one eyed his gold. Here in laughing, talking actuality was a living witness of what humanity might arrive at when—well, when we tread the streets of Utopia. Happiness is catching. No doubt this admiration sometimes elated him, without his being aware of it. At times, in certain company, it must have been a positive vexation. Admiration is a dense medium though which to press to what treasure may be beyond. Poets, indeed, unlike children, and for their own sake if not for that of others, should be heard and not seen ; and it must have

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been very difficult for this poet to take cover, to lie low. He came; *you* saw; *he* conquered. And after? Like a good child's birthday cake, he was as rich as he looked.

"I never met," wrote to his mother one heaven-sent friend (I mean sent *to* the outskirts of heaven), "I never met so entirely likeable a chap. . . . Your son was not merely a genius; what is perhaps more important, he had a charm that was literally like sunshine." Indeed the good things simply softly shimmered out of him—wit, enthusiasm, ideas, raillery, fun, and that sympathetic imagination concerning everybody and everything that he himself said was the artist's one duty. He had, of course, his own terms—critical, and perhaps at times a little exacting. If he suffered a fool, no more than with the rest of his own generation was it with a guileless gladness. He preferred humanity to be not too stiff, not too stupid, and not too dry. Talk he loved; and when he listened, his mind was in his eyes, "tree whispering to tree without wind, quietly." If he hated, if his sensitiveness wholly recoiled, then that emphatically was the end of the matter.

He confronted his fellow-creatures just like the boy he was, ready to face what and who may come without flinching; smiling lip and steady

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eye. One was conscious of occasional shynesses and silences, even a little awkwardness at times that was in itself a grace. One was still more conscious of an insatiable interest and speculation. His quiet gaze took you in; yours couldn't so easily take him in. These are but my own remembrances, few, alas, however vivid and unfading: and even at that they are merely those of one of the less responsive sex!

In spite of life's little disillusionments (which, it is prudent to remember, we may cause as well as endure); in spite of passing moods of blackness and revulsion, nothing could be clearer in his poems, in his letters, and in himself, than his zest and happiness. Looking back on his school-life he said that he had been happier than he could find words to say. What wonder that at twenty he describes himself as in the depths of despondency "because of my age"? And a little later: "I am just too old for romance." What does that mean but that he found life so full and so arresting that he was afraid he might not be able to keep pace with it? It was a needless apprehension. The sea was deep beneath the waves and the foam. If he had lived to be, let us say, forty, he would have said just the same thing, though, perhaps, with more

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emphasis and more philosophy. He was never to experience that passing misfortune. He flung himself into the world—of men or of books, of thought and affairs—as a wasp pounces into a cakeshop, Hotspur into the fighting. When his soul flourished on Walter Pater and Aubrey Beardsley, he thought it a waste of time to walk and swim. When, together with meat and alcohol, he gave up these rather rarified dainties, and lived, as it is fabulously reported, on milk and honey, it seemed a waste of time to do anything else. He could not be half-hearted. Indeed, in that “tearing hunger to do things”—working, playing, reading, writing, publishing, travelling, talking, socialism, politics—any one thing seemed a waste of time, because meanwhile the rest of life’s feast was kept waiting. “What an incredibly lovely, superb world!” he exclaims. Lovely, superb—what are the precise epithets which we should choose? Again, “it *is* fun going and making thousands of acquaintances.” It must be fun—when you are Rupert Brooke. Frankly, voraciously, that is how he met everything and everybody—from Mrs Grundy to the Statue of Liberty.

The Statue of Liberty reminds me, vividly and happily, of America. Three years ago, the fact that one of the great American Universities had

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awarded Brooke the first Howland Memorial Prize—"in recognition of an achievement of marked distinction in the field of literature"—passed, comparatively speaking, unnoticed in England. But that award was not merely an academic compliment. The value of a gift is in the spirit of the giver, and this gift of love and admiration was from the heart. The friend—because none worthier to be sent was free—the friend of Brooke's whose privilege it was to go to New Haven formally to receive that prize on Mrs Brooke's behalf, was absolutely unknown there. His name—my name, as a matter of fact—was, alas, no *Sesame*. In New York I went, I remember, to call one day on a very charming friend of Brooke's, to whom he wrote some of his gayest letters. A graceful coloured lift-girl inquired who the caller was. I told her. Whereupon she exclaimed, with a smile all radiant gold and ivory, "Gee whiz! what a name!" This trifling and immodest digression is only to show just how Mrs Brooke's ambassador stood in the great eye of America. Now, in Brooke's own words, "American hospitality means that with the nice ones you can be at once on happy and intimate terms." I wish I had words to express how true that is—that heedful, self-sacrificing, unbounded kindness. The nice

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ones indeed were everywhere, for without exception they all knew, or knew of, Brooke. Not that they knew no other contemporary English poet, perhaps even a little better than John Bull does himself—Mr Yeats, Mr Binyon, Mr Masefield, Mr Gibson. But I had but to whisper “R. B.”—and the warmest welcome and interest were mine. Now, in nineteen hundred and sixteen that welcome for his sake was not merely of literary significance. The ardour and devotion of those English sonnets of his had gone home, and the home of poetry is world-wide. Never was a true friendship between two countries and nations of such vital importance as that between England and America to-day. Long before the American nation actually “came into” the war, many, many hearts there beat truly with ours. Cousins cannot invariably see eye to eye. But we cannot forget that generous sympathy in the hour when England needed it. Our steady insight and understanding, with as slight an admixture as possible of a peculiar quality of insularity which may be comprehensively described as “God-Almightiness,” is the least we can give in return.

I hope it will be no breach of confidence if I quote a few words from a letter I received from a friend in America only the other day, one who

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knew Brooke's poetry not by hearsay, but by heart. "I dutifully belong," she writes, "to the English-speaking Unions, and am properly interested in various schemes for making the relations between England and America closer. But I may say this to you—I don't want the alliance to result in the least Americanizing of England. I want England to remain 'like her mother who died yesterday';" (she is quoting Edward Thomas, rare poet and rarest friend). "We over here," she continues, "can't have all the simple, lovely and solitary things of which Englishmen write. It helps so much to be able to think of them as they are in England." These are the words of a devotee of England—such devotees as poetry makes and keeps.

But such were the friends that Brooke himself with his poetry, personality and happiness made wherever he went. "Happy," indeed, is the refrain that runs through all his letters. And then, at length, when on his way to the last great adventure of all: "I have never," he writes, "I have never been so pervasively happy in my life." That is how he opened the door into one's life, and came in. But behind all that we say or do, behind even what we think, is the solitude wherein dwells what we are: and to that solitude he was no stranger, even though it was not what

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called most frequently for expression. Because each day was so great a tax, however welcome, on mind and body, he sometimes longed for sleep :

O haven without wave or tide !
Silence, in which all songs have died !
Holy book, where hearts are still !
And home at length under the hill !
O mother quiet, breasts of peace,
Where love itself would faint and cease !
O infinite deep I never knew,
I would come back, come back to you,
Find you, as a pool unstirred,
Kneel down by you, and never a word,
Lay my head, and nothing said,
In your hands, ungarlanded ;
And a long watch you would keep ;
And I should sleep, and I should sleep !

So, again and again his thoughts in his poetry turn towards death, only in appearance the deepest sleep of all. But then, again, since nothing in life could satisfy such a hunger and aspiration for life, beyond mood and change he longed for a peace " where sense is with knowing one " : and, beyond even this bodiless communion, for the peace that passes understanding :

Lost into God, as lights in light, we fly,
Grown one with will.

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Simply because things as they are are not as they should be, we take refuge at times from the defeats and despairs of this mortal existence in satire and scepticism, a passing doubt in man, in goodness, in the heavenly power. So, too, did he. He kept piling up the fuel for those "flaming brains" of his; took life at the flood. When ashes succeeded the blaze and the tide ran low and the mud-flats shimmered in the mocking sunshine; why, he could at least be frank. Each in turn he accepted life's promises; when it broke some of them—as it sometimes must in order to keep the others—he closely examined the pieces, whatever the pang. One promise, however, would never have failed him: "There are only three good things in this world: one is to read, one is to write, the other is to live poetry." The last is by far the most difficult, and Mrs Grundy is not uncharmed to discover that not all the poets are masters of the art. But there it is: they are his own deliberate words; and he meant what he said.

What, if he had lived, he would have *done* in this world is a fascinating but an unanswerable question. This only can be said: that he would have gone on being his wonderful self. Radium is inexhaustible. As we look back

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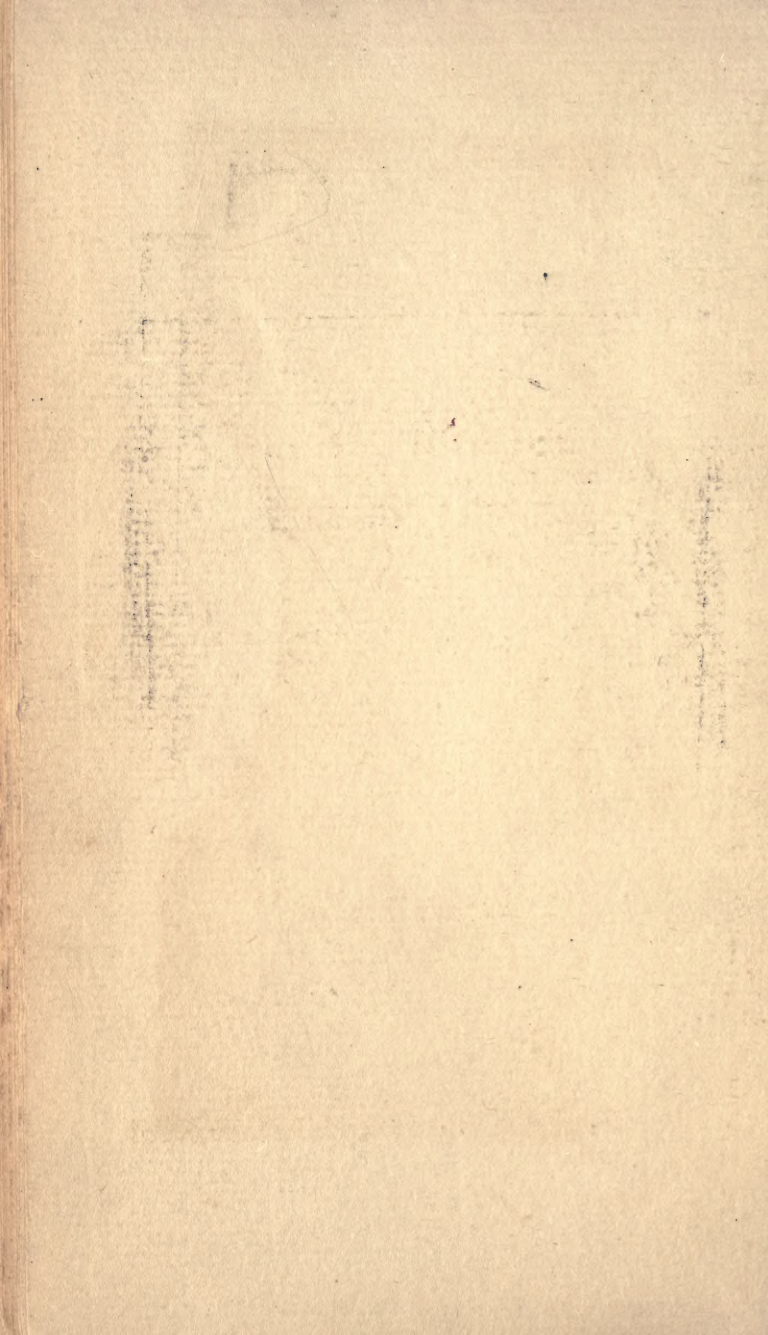
across the gulf of these last four years we see him in vividest outline against the gloom. Other poets, beloved of the gods, and not unendeared to humanity, have died young, as did he. Indeed it may be that, however uncompromising the usages of time, every poet, every man in whom burns on a few coals of imagination, "dies young." But no other English poet of his age has given up his life at a moment so signal, so pregnant. This has isolated and set Rupert Brooke apart. No single consciousness can even so much as vaguely realise the sacrifice of mind and hope and aspiration, of life and promise, "lovely and of good report," which this pitiless and abominable war has meant to England and to the world. His sacrifice was representative. The "incantation of his verse" quickened "a new birth," his words were "sparks among mankind."

What place in English literature the caprices of time and taste will at length accord him does not concern us. Let us in our thoughts be as charitable as we can to our posterity, who will have leisure for judgment, and can confer that remembrance which fleeting humanity flatters in the term "immortality."

I saw him beat the surges under him,
And ride upon their backs . . .

His bold head

'Bove the contentious waves he kept, and oar'd
Himself with his good arms in lusty stroke
To the shore, that o'er his wave-worn basis bow'd
As stooping to relieve him. I not doubt
He came alive to land.



F.L. 23-11-61

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